

RELEASE WHEN ADDRESS IS DELIVERED
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CHIEF FORESTER SILCOX ADDRESSES
NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE CONFERENCE

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F. A. Silcox, Chief of the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and, by appointment of the President, Chairman of the North American Wildlife Conference, opened the Conference this afternoon with an address on "Objectives of the Wildlife Conference". He said in part:

We are assembled here in a common effort to help restore and conserve the vanishing wildlife resources of a continent.

This is a serious purpose. It has wide scientific interest and significance. Its aesthetic, spiritual, and recreational values are enormous. It affects the social and economic welfare of some 150 millions of people in three great nations.

By its very nature, this Conference is in effect a meeting of the people of a Continent. It is entirely autonomous. Its perpetuation, its future aims, aspirations, and methods of representation are subject to its own decisions. The hope is that through its deliberations new cooperation between private, public, and international interests will develop; that from it will come constructive proposals; that through these proposals there may be evolved such intelligent, concerted, and cooperative action as will help restore and conserve some semblance of our original wildlife resources.

This is a huge task. It has certain very practical limitations. Pioneer conditions can never be restored. We may long for them, but we must admit that never again will it be possible for man to see in the valley of the Yellowstone what Captain Reynolds described in 1860 as a tract of 40 or 50 square miles so thickly covered with buffalo that it looked like a small pasture into which a large drove of cattle had been turned for a single night.

We know, too, that never again will the broad valleys of the Upper Missouri support, as the Lewis and Clark journal reveals that they did in 1805, an aggregation of wildlife - including buffalo, elk, antelope, deer, moose, big horn sheep, grizzly bear, prairie chicken, geese, and ducks - that for number and variety exceeded anything the eye of man had ever looked upon.

These pictures of early abundance are typical of pioneer days in the West. Comparable conditions once existed in the North, the South, and the East. The country was virgin then, with a biotic balance in fauna and flora undisturbed by the white man's presence. Since then much has happened. With the building of western railroads, buffalo were killed by the tens of thousands for their tongues alone; hundreds of thousands were slaughtered for their hides. Elk were killed for a pair of tusks; deer and other elk for their hides. Huge construction camps were fed chiefly on antelope. Then, to help support the rapid influx of settlers, fences were built, sod was plowed under, ranches appeared, prairies were pastured by sheep and cattle until original environments largely disappeared and with them, much of our wildlife.

In addition, then, to the slaughter and waste of pioneer days, this destruction of favorable environments has in itself been a major cause of our present wildlife plight. And it is now one of the obstacles to be overcome in solving the problem of restoring our wildlife resources.

Wildlife environments can not now be restored to those pioneer conditions which once existed on broad areas which are now in urban and rural occupancy. That is neither physically possible nor socially desirable. But they can be restored to the extent that wildlife may again play the part it should in the social and economic life of a continent; we can still do a great deal, through improving environments, to better the present wildlife conditions on them. And it is after all the present rather than pioneer conditions with which we now must deal.

How may these and other things be done? And where, and by what agencies? To gather and make available information on these points and about other pertinent facts and discoveries, is one of the purposes of this Conference. Opportunities for discussion are provided in a series of carefully planned forenoon sessions. I urge wide participation in them, for clear understandings and honest approaches to such problems are essential to the restoration and conservation of North American wildlife.

On many of these problems divergent points of view are held. Differences in some cases are between individuals. In others they are between technical and professional groups or between laymen and technicians; between regional groups or between groups which represent public and those which represent special interests. So long, however, as these differences are honestly held and at this Conference are honestly and clearly expressed, they should help both to define problems with which we are faced and to devise practicable methods to solve them. Both these things spell real progress toward a common goal.

There is need for progress, for by comparison with pioneer conditions, the present wildlife picture is in most sections of the United States one of scarcity or want. Buffalo, reduced from former millions to some 4,400 head, are confined very largely in a semi-domesticated state to preserves and reservations. One species of white-tailed deer which formerly roamed western Washington is extinct. The last white-tailed deer is reported to have disappeared from Yellowstone Park in the winter of 1923-24. Prong-horned antelope, now on the increase within reservations and refuges, are nevertheless reduced from some 30 to 40 millions to an estimated sixty odd thousand.

Mountain goats, moose, many species of migratory waterfowl, and grizzly bear are scarce. It is a hard struggle for them to hold their own. Elk were so decimated that in 1904 domestication was urged as the only practical method of preservation. Food fish in the Great Lakes and in long stretches of both coastal waters are approaching exhaustion. Game and food fish in most major rivers and streams are gone or reduced to a shadow of their former numbers. Certain species of songbirds are so scarce as almost to be classed as museum specimens. Upland birds and fur bearers, existing as scattered remnants of former abundance, are still declining. Canvas back and redhead duck are on the way out. The whir of heath hen and passenger pigeon is gone from the land.

Pastures have replaced prairies, dust-storms becloud and befoul vast areas which were once wildlife breeding grounds. On National Parks and National Forests wildlife is increasing, but much of our privately owned range land and public domain is depleted. Streams and harbors are polluted by municipal and industrial wastes. Fences and "no trespass" signs greet devotees of camera, rod, and gun.

Traditional opportunities and joys of the hunt are increasingly curtailed and restricted. Political expediency is too often the rule in wildlife affairs. Over the length and breadth of the land fishermen and hunters, bird lovers and recreationists, city dwellers and urban folk, fathers and sons, scientists, sportsmen, and laymen are disheartened and discouraged at conditions which you who represent them here, know so well.

It was with these conditions clearly in mind that President Roosevelt issued his call and set the dates for this North American Wildlife Conference. Recognizing no single region or no single group, it was addressed to the millions of people who individually and in thousands of groups, societies, unions and leagues, have worked valiantly and long to promote local and group interest in certain phases of wildlife restoration and conservation.

The President's call was, then, a national and an international one. It recognized the broad wildlife plight, and the urgency of it. Through the medium of this Conference and the open covenants which he hopes it may bring forth, his call provides an opportunity to remedy that plight.

I have every confidence that the Conference will in good faith and with a high heart make the most of this opportunity. Certainly it is representative enough to do so. Certainly it has within it - and at its command - the brains, the intelligence, and the expert knowledge to do so. Its members and their constituents have, too, ample background, a wealth of practical experience, the common sense to look to the past for guidance but not blindly to follow the past. And I know the men and women here have the courage to propose such new methods and adopt such bold action as may be necessary successfully to accomplish the common purpose.

But with all the brains, all the experience, all the courage and all the high resolve that is gathered here, that purpose cannot be accomplished if individuals and groups stick to their own particular lasts or fail of such a practical approach as will assure due consideration to economic requirements of existing social structures. If wildlife is to be restored and conserved, all factors must be weighed and evaluated and individual action and unconcerted group and regional action must be correlated, coordinated, and fused into cooperative, national and international planning and action for the good of all.

It is unnecessary to take any man's word for the need for this. Look for a moment to the past, for there ample confirmation lies. Wildlife organizations have existed for many years. Their numbers have been -- and are -- in the thousands; the number of their conscientious, courageous, zealous members mounts to many millions. Their potential strength has been -- and is -- enormous. Working long and faithfully and hard, they have accomplished certain things. But in all the years of work they have had neither a common program nor a single, effective, non-partisan, central organization. For such a purpose as restoration and conservation of the wildlife of a nation or a continent, they have therefore been leaderless, rudderless, and inarticulate; their work has often been at cross purposes; their results an indiscernible ripple in the ever-ebbing wildlife tide.

This Conference offers a way out. It can be effectively articulate. It can lay the groundwork for a united national wildlife program. Without disturbing existing organizations, invading occupied fields of activity, or usurping a single sacred prerogative, it can through your initiative and determination affiliate all wildlife organizations and interests; - - - - -

can create a single, powerful union through which the potential strength of thousands of affiliates and millions of their own individual members may effectively be brought to bear upon that common objective, the restoration and conservation of North American wildlife.

This Conference provides, then, three major opportunities. One is to learn about discoveries and information pertinent to wildlife and the wildlife situation. Another is to develop an adequate national and international wildlife program. A third is to organize a permanent affiliation of all wildlife interests and groups; to create one central union so articulate, so powerful, and so effective that real progress in restoring and conserving the vanishing wildlife resources of a continent can no longer be prevented.

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the President of the United States, at whose invitation we are assembled here, I now declare the North American Wildlife Conference formally in session.